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ABSTRACT

The Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) First-Grade Composition Skills Exercises are designed to aid in the development of composition skills of first-grade children. The program consists of 64 two- or four-page exercises which were designed to correspond with the developing writing abilities of first-grade pupils. The tryout of the program followed a spring 1970 tryout; it began in September 1970 and ended in June 1971. The tryout population consisted of 14 first-grade classes in San Diego using the Second-Year Communication Skills Program. Since extensive performance data demonstrating the effectiveness of the program had already been gathered in the spring 1970 tryout, program evaluation was limited to feedback from six teachers concerning the program revisions. (Author/MKM)

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SOUTHWEST REGIONAL LABORATORY TECHNICAL NOTE

DATE: August 18, 1971

NO: TN 3-71-05

TITLE: THE 1970-1971 CLASSROOM TRYOUT OF THE REVISED SWRL FIRST-GRADE COMPOSITION SKILLS EXERCISES (CSE 1)

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ABSTRACT

The SWRL First-Grade Composition Skills Exercises are designed to aid in the development of composition skills of first-grade children. The program (CSE 1) consists of 64 two- or four-page exercises which were designed to correspond with the developing writing abilities of first-grade pupils. The tryout of the program, which was revised following the Spring, 1970 tryout, began in September, 1970 and ended in June, 1971. The tryout population consisted of 14 first-grade classes in San Diego using SYCSP. Inasmuch as extensive performance data which demonstrated the effectiveness of the program were already gathered in the Spring, 1970 tryout, program evaluation for this tryout was limited to teacher feedback concerning the program revisions.

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THE 1970-1971 CLASSROOM TRYOUT OF THE REVISED SWRL FIRST-GRADE COMPOSITION SKILLS EXERCISES

The SWRL First-Grade Composition Skills Exercises (CSE 1) have as their main objective the development of composition skills in grade one pupils. The program (CSE 1) consists of 64 exercises which are integrated with the Second-Year Communication Skills Program (SYCSP) reading skills and with the developing writing abilities of first-grade children. The purpose of the 1970-71 tryout was to validate the revisions made in the program based on teacher feedback from the Spring, 1970 tryout. (See Appendix A for revision recommendations.)

Procedures

Tryout Population

Fourteen classes consisting of approximately 420 children in five San Diego schools participated in the 1970-71 tryout. All the classes were committed to the use of SYCSP.

Instructional Materials

Pupil materials in the CSE 1 are 64 two- or four-page exercises and a SWRL Word List Booklet.

Composition Skills Exercises. Revision specifications for each of the exercises used in the Spring, 1970 tryout are provided in Appendix B. The exercises progress from simple select or select and write option responses to the more difficult constructed responses. As the exercises progress, pupil responses also progress from single-word to paragraph responses. The vocabulary employed in the exercises is

based on the basic word content of the First-Year Communication Skills Program, and it incorporates new SYCSP words as the children progress in the program. Though correlated in terms of word content with the basic SYCSP storybooks, the exercises are otherwise independent of the reading program.

Word List Booklets. Each pupil received a 23 page Word List Booklet containing an alphabetical listing of all words used in the First- and Second-Year Communication Skills Programs. The booklets served as a spelling reference for pupils when they progressed to the constructed response phase of the program.

Teacher's Guide. The Teacher's Guide provides a description of the program as well as specific instructions concerning the use of the exercises and the SWRL Word List Booklet.

Program Evaluation

In the Spring, 1970 tryout each of the 64 exercises was evaluated by participating teachers as it was employed in the classrooms. A more global evaluation of the exercises was performed at the end of the program by means of a discussion session and a written teacher questionnaire. Comparative performance data were obtained from comparable SYCSP classrooms in Clark County, Nevada and Los Angeles, California on a posttest requiring children to write a story describing a pictured activity. On the average, the pupils who had CSE 1 wrote compositions which were approximately three times as long as the comparison pupils (71 words as compared to 25 words) with significantly

fewer punctuation and spelling errors. The compositions of the tryout pupils were also rated significantly ($p < .005$) higher on subjective ratings by a panel of four judges (Sullivan, Okada and Niedermeyer, 1971).

The evaluation of the 1970-1971 tryout was limited to the feedback provided by six of the participating teachers in a May, 1971 discussion session and by an end of program questionnaire. Three of the six teachers had participated in the Spring, 1970 tryout. Complete feedback data are provided in Appendix D.

Generally, the feedback from the teachers in the 1970-1971 tryout reflected a favorable response toward the program. All teachers responding to the questionnaire were desirous of using the program again and rated their experience with the program as enjoyable or very enjoyable. All agreed that the sequencing of the program was about right for most children. They were divided on the question relating to grammar. Half of the teachers requested more emphasis on grammar and half approved the present emphasis. One teacher commented that punctuation and spelling should not be stressed in a "creative program." (The present program teaches the use of capital letters in proper nouns and the beginning of sentences and the use of periods and question marks.)

The decrease in pupil interest in the exercises over the year is due in part to the reduction of the novelty effect and the increasing difficulty of the tasks required of the children. This phenomenon was also observed in the previous tryout. The reduction in the interest level based on a per exercise analysis was well within acceptable bounds.

Only one teacher reported that the program required too much preparation and follow-up time. The others rated their time requirements as moderate.

The average pupil time to complete each exercise was 14 minutes and the average correction time was reported as 5 minutes per page. The latter figure is probably an overestimate.

Data from the Spring, 1970 tryout provided conclusive evidence as to the effectiveness of the program. Both the Spring, 1970 and the 1970-1971 tryout of the Revised Composition Skills Exercises provided critical program information for the Mod 2 First-Grade Composition Skills Exercises. Further revisions will be limited to routine editing.

References

Sullivan, Howard J., Okada, Masahito, Niedermeyer, Fred C., "Development of First Graders' Composition Skills," SWRL Professional Paper No. 17, August, 1971.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY AND REVISION RECOMMENDATIONS (SPRING, 1970)

A 64 lesson first-grade writing program was developed and tried out during the last 6 months of the 1969-1970 academic year. Formative evaluation was conducted during and following the course of the tryout. Data gathered through on-site visits by SWRL staff, lesson evaluation sheets, teacher questionnaires, discussion seminars, and a posttest comparing participating classes with comparable SYCSP classes have been provided in this report (Spring, 1970).

On the basis of the foregoing data, it is recommended that the CSE be continued after the following revisions have been incorporated into the component:

1) Exercises 1-5 should be changed from a select-only response type to a select or select and write option response. This would permit children to write earlier in the program and avoid some of the confusion generated by the selection-only response.
2) Increase the number of responses required by pupils in the first half of the component to approximate more nearly an average working time of 10 minutes per worksheet. The specification guidelines for revision are outlined in Appendix B.
3) Beginning with Lesson 6, the use of capitals and end punctuation should be periodically worked into the sequence.

4) The shift from two to four page formats should be made sooner in order to minimize the problem created by small pictures. This would also provide for increases in lesson length. The specifications for these changes are also provided in Appendix B.

5) If possible, some of the exercises incorporating fiction story characters should be rewritten employing the more popular animal and fantasy characters.

6) All technical problems noted by teachers in individual exercises should be taken into consideration in revising the components.

APPENDIX B

REVISION SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE 1970-71
COMPOSITION SKILLS EXERCISES

Worksheet Number	Pages	Pictures	Format	Response Type	Response Quantity	Words Written by Child
1	2	R *	H **	S/W #	W ##	10
2	2	R	H	S/W	W	10
3	2	R	H	S/W	W	10
4	2	R	H	S/W	W	10
5	2	R	H	S/W	W	10
6	2	NC	H	S/W	W	10
7	2	NC	V	S/W	W	10
8	2	NC	H	S/W	W	10
9	2	NC	H	S/W	W	10
10	2	NC	V	S/W	W	10
11	2	R	V	S+W	W	10
12	2	NC	V	S+W	MW	10
13	2	NC	V	S+W	MW	10
14	2	NC	V	S+W	MW	10
15	2	NC	V	S+W	W	10
16	4	E	V	S+W	W	15
17	4	NC	V	S+W	W	15
18	4	NP	V	S+W	W	15
19	4	NC	V	S+W	MW	15
20	4	NC	V	S+W	MW	15
21	4	E	V	S+W	MW	15
22	4	NP	V	S+W	MW	15
23	4	E	V	S+W	P	15-20
24	4	E	V	S+W	P	15-20
25	4	DP	V	S+W	P	15-20
26	4	NC	V	S+W	W	14
27	4	R	V	C	W	10
28	2	NC	V	C	W	10-12
29	2	NC	V	C	W	10-12
30	2	NC	V	C=W S+W=P	W	10-12
31	4	R	V	C	W	10-12
32	4	NC	V	S+W	W	17
33	4	NC	V	C	W	10-12

Worksheet Number	Pages	Pictures	Format	Response Type	Response Quantity	Words Written by Child
34	4	NC	V	C	W	10-12
35	4	NC	V	C	W	10-14
36	4	NC	V	C	W	10-14
37	4	NC	V	C	W	10-14
38	4	NC	V	C	W	10-14
39	4	NC	V	C	P	10-14
40	4	NC	V	S+W	P	22
41	4	NC	V	C	S	22
42	4	NC	V	C	S	21
43	4	NC	V	C	S	25
44	4	NC	V	C	S	28
45	4	NC	V	C	S	31
46	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
47	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
48	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
49	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
50	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
51	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
52	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
53	4	NC	V	C	S	25+
54	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
55	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
56	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
57	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
58	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
59	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
60	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
61	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
62	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
63	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+
64	4	NC	V	C	Par	35+

* R= Reduce; NC= no change; E= enlarge; NP= new pictures

** H= horizontal layout; V= vertical layout

\# S/W= select or write option; S+W= Select and write; C= construct

W= word; MW= multiple word; P= phrase; S= sentence; Par= paragraph

APPENDIX C

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE*

Revised Composition Skills Exercises

To the teacher: Your judgment concerning various aspects of the revised Composition Skills Exercises (CSE) will assist SWRL in revising and improving the program for a 1971-72 tryout. Please respond candidly to the questions below. While most questions require only a check, some require a written response. Please feel free to comment on any aspect of the program, whether or not a comment has been specifically requested. A space has been provided below each question for this purpose. We realize that the completion of a questionnaire is an additional requirement on your time and we sincerely thank you for your cooperation in our revision efforts.

Directions: Please provide the following information by either checking or recording the appropriate responses.

Program Application

1. I feel that the CSE should stress grammar: (check one)

   3 a. more
   ___ b. less
   3 c. about the same

   Comments: but taught within the unit framework

2. The rate at which the program progresses is: (check one)

   ___ a. too fast for most children
   ___ b. too slow for most children
   6 c. about right for most children

   Comments: fast for fast ones, slow for slow, etc.

3. When writing stories, the children preferred: (check one)

   4 a. structured "fill-in" story formats
   ___ b. less structured "tell this story" formats
   2 c. structured and less structured formats about the same

   Comments: _____

4. Does the CSE take too much classroom time? (check one)

   6 a. no
   ___ b. yes, because _____

5. After the introduction of the SWRL Word List Booklets, children generally: (check one)

1 a. reduced their spelling errors
2 b. used a larger writing vocabulary
1 c. both reduced their spelling errors and used a larger writing vocabulary
2 d. neither reduced their spelling errors nor used a larger writing vocabulary

Comments: Need more words in the booklet. I had a hard time getting them to use the word lists. I found that the pictures stimulated more words taught in SWRL--so used City Word Lists

6. Pupil interest in the word exercises generally: (check one)

___ a. began high and remained high during the year
___ b. increased during the year
4 c. decreased during the year
___ d. began low and remained low during the year

Comments: The last few seemed to drag for the children. It was different for each group. The more able remained enthusiastic. The slower child felt burdened.

7. Teacher preparation and follow-up time required by the program were: (check one)

1 a. too much
5 b. moderate
___ c. very little

Comments: _____

8. Usually, children followed the exercise directions: (check one)

3 a. correctly as they were given
2 b. only after brief clarification
1 c. only after detailed clarification
___ d. incorrectly

Comments: _____

9. My children were ready to write paragraph responses: (check one)

___ a. much sooner than they were required by the program
___ b. much later than they were required by the program
6 c. about when they were required by the program

Comments: My top group finished the units far ahead of the rest.

10. Please briefly describe the procedures you used with the exercises (i.e., How did you introduce them? Did the children complete them on their own? How did you correct the completed exercises?).

I introduced them by giving directions and doing the first one together. The children did them on their own. I corrected them by only putting an X where there were mistakes--they fixed them and turned them back in to be okayed by me.

1. Gave a brief explanation and read directions.
2. Allowed children to complete on their own.
3. Corrected the mistakes.
4. Had the children read and redo.

I went over the worksheets with the children--we discussed pictures, etc. They completed them independently and I corrected all of them.

Discussed format when it was new!! Then did an example sentence--from then on children relied on previous experience of same type of exercise. Corrected worksheets were returned and had to be finished as corrected.

Presented sheet and usually did first page with group. Helped-wrote in several blanks. Then group completed on their own. Corrected punctuation, grammar, etc.

Please fill in the following answers regarding time spent on various aspects of the program:

11. On the average, time required to complete an exercise was about 15,10,15,15 minutes.

12. The simplest exercises required an average of about 8-5,12,5-10 minutes.

13. The most difficult exercises required an average of about 17-20,20,20 minutes.

14. The average pupil time spent per page in correcting responses was about ? ?,5,5 minutes.

Program Evaluation

15. My experience with the CSE has been: (check one)

2 a. very enjoyable
4 b. enjoyable
___ c. unenjoyable

Comments: I felt the children gained a great deal from the program. Worthwhile--should continue

16. Would you like to use the CSE again next year? (check one)

6 a. yes
___ b. no, because_____

17. In the space below please add any further comments and/or suggestions you may have concerning the CSE.

The pacing of the program was very good. The children enjoyed them very much. One thing that could be improved is endings, i.e., changing y to i and adding es, and rules, i.e., adding ly.

I do not believe that the punctuation marks and spelling errors were necessary in a creative program.

Make pictures more attractive--some of the art work (illustrations) were confusing.

Still some typing and identifying corrections to be made (referring to Mat in story when Mat wasn't in the story!). Less of the ones where almost any answer is correct (They just go and choose anyone.). They come out silly but don't really seem to be of much value.

Was very pleased with results with some of more capable youngsters and with one or two of the "low" pupils who seemed to blossom, expressed themselves in delightful stories. I saw a definite carry-over into the language program with better stories from most of group.